



Network Effect

Martha Wells

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You know that feeling when you're at work, and you've had enough of people, and then the boss walks in with yet another job that needs to be done right this second or the world will end, but all you want to do is go home and binge your favorite shows? And you're a sentient murder machine programmed for destruction? Congratulations, you're Murderbot.

I'm usually alone in my head, and that's where 90 plus percent of my problems are.

When Murderbot's human associates (not friends, never friends) are captured and another not-friend from its past requires urgent assistance, Murderbot must choose between inertia and drastic action.

Drastic action it is, then.

Network Effect Details

Network Effect (The Murderbot Diaries #5)

346 pages , Published May 5th 2020 by Tor.com

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Niki Hawkes - The Obsessive Bookseller says

[4.5/5 stars!] There are few things in life that make me happier than spending time with Murderbot.

... which is ironic, considering it would rather do literally anything than be social. The Novellas alone were enough to solidify the series as an all-time favorite, so discovering this full-length novel was in the works immediate jumped it to the top of my priority list for 2020. Network Effect was every bit as sardonic, action-packed, and endearing as the novellas, but took it one step further by adding even more depth to the characters.

The unique writing style is the best thing about these books (aside from character construction). It doesn't follow typical storytelling constructs and often comes across as more conversational than anything else. There's a great deal of punctuation used to convey Murderbot's sardonic tone, and no shortage of profanity for comedic impact. I've never read anything that comes this close to how I communicate in my daily life, so even the bones of how the story was presented sang to my soul. There were a few occasions where the sarcastic voice was a bit heavy-handed, but this is one of the few cases I would rather a little too much than not enough.

And then we have Murderbot. The best character in sci-fi, hands-down.

I think it's my spirit animal. It's awkward and introverted and just wants to be left alone to watch its tv serials and I can relate to every single solitary time it couldn't bring itself to "people" anymore. But the brilliance in this novel is that, social obligational constructs aside, it still craves connection. And that's where the story becomes much more than a action-packed sci-fi. It's about a rogue SecUnit trying to carve out a place for itself in the universe. Did Murderbot make me cry? Maybe. I don't know. Fuck off.

Recommendations: The Murderbot Diaries is in close running with The Expanse and Planetside as my favorite sci-fi on the market. It's exciting, it's funny as shit, and it has that magic X-factor that gets people emotionally invested. Start with All Systems Red, and I bet you'll know within the first few pages if it's something you'll enjoy. I was hooked from the first sentence, and it has only gotten better from there. Consider this an official Obsessive Bookseller endorsement – this series is fantastic!

Via The Obsessive Bookseller at www.NikiHawkes.com

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Nataliya says

"(You know, if you don't want to be manually eviscerated with your own energy weapon then maybe you shouldn't go around killing research transports and antagonizing rogue SecUnits.)"

I finally figured out that one of the reasons I love Murderbot so much is that it's my soul-sibling. MB's preemptive pessimism and expectation of the worst case scenario every time it is faced with a new problem is exactly my modus operandi, although I'm rather good at concealing it.

"I was worried about Mensah, if everything had been okay while I was gone. I wasn't sure exactly what "okay" would involve, but I was willing to settle for "unmurdered."

“It was too dark for her to see my expression. I’m not sure what it was but you could probably describe it as “skeptical.” (Ratthi says that’s how I look most of the time.)”

This is the first full-length Murderbot novel, following four amazing novellas that I only discovered a couple of weeks ago, but already cannot remember what life was like without Murderbot in it. (I kid, I kid - well, mostly.) In typical Murderbot fashion we have **all the snarky sarcastic grumpiness of our prickly media-obsessed nonhuman person** who is secretly a softie, but if you mention the f-word ((view spoiler)) to it you have only yourself to blame for what’s going to follow. We have space exploration and space raiders and alien abductors and sentient killware and contamination by alien remnants, and space flight and explosions and other stuff that tends to result in the catastrophic systems failure and forced systems shutdown more often than not.

But what we have at the heart of this story is, of course, the issue of personhood and interpersonal relationships. **And friendship - that other dreaded f-word.**

“In a low voice, Ratthi commented to Overseer, “Anyone who thinks machine intelligences don’t have emotions needs to be in this very uncomfortable room right now.”

You see, after a pretty traumatic life of being treated as nothing more than “*an appliance for a team*”, a dangerous weapon that can be discarded and abandoned if its human clients need to save their own hides, and being very much an introvert to begin with, Murderbot is not too comfortable with feelings and affection and emotions. Not that it does not have emotions - those are present in abundance - but MB is very uncomfortable expressing them. M-Bot is a very private person and prefers it that way.

“Ratthi had said, “I think you should let it go for a while, at least until we get ourselves out of this situation. SecUnit is a very private person, it doesn’t like to discuss its feelings.” This is why Ratthi is my friend.”

MB has its favorite human Dr. Mensah, and our old friends from the Preservation Aux survey team from the first novella (“*Just clients. And if anyone or anything tried to hurt them, I would rip its intestines out.*”) but it is more than reluctant to admit how much others can mean to it. Especially when a certain “ART” is concerned, an immense artificial intelligence located in the interplanetary spaceship that Murderbot befriended back in the second novella, and gave it, ahem, an interesting nickname (“*Except that I’m being held prisoner by a giant asshole of a research transport.*”).

“(If I got angry at myself for being angry I would be angry constantly and I wouldn’t have time to think about anything else.) (Wait, I think I am angry constantly. That might explain a lot.)”

Murderbot goes through a **complicated and confusing mix of emotional breakdown and a temper tantrum** (although that last one was mostly justified given all those feelings of betrayal), and tries to come to term with the blatantly obvious fact that its relationship with ART is that of a deeply committed friendship. Yeah, I know.

“It still sounded disgusting. “Do you have to call it a relationship?” Ratthi shrugged one shoulder. “You don’t like the word ‘friendship.’ What else is there?” I had no idea. I did a quick search on my archives and pulled out the first result. “Mutual administrative assistance?”

Yes, emotional vulnerability is difficult for our SecUnit. Can’t fault it for that - MB’s life until a few kilohours ago used to be basically a neverending case of PTSD.

“I yelled, “ART, stop talking to my human behind my back!”

You know that thing humans do where they think they're being completely logical and they absolutely are not being logical at all, and on some level they know that, but can't stop? Apparently it can happen to SecUnits, too."

The other continuing thread is **the right of a sentient intelligent being to self-determination and personhood**, the overarching theme of the entire series.

Murderbot's world is the corporatized universe of the future, where planets with their inhabitants are property and indentured servitude to companies is a way of life, and Corporation Rim is a very powerful supragalactic entity "(Corporations didn't actually invent space and planets, despite the patents the company had tried to file.)" Unlike the more egalitarian and utopian outliers of the Preservation Alliance, Corporation Rim will always view our MB as not a person but property, tool, weapon, appliance, dangerous but disposable. And the more we get to know MB the more and more jarring this feels; instead of desensitization **the incongruence between what it IS and what the corporate world considers it to be becomes more and more painful**. As it should be.

"I was getting tired of being told what to do. Self-determination was a pain in the ass sometimes but it beat the alternative by a lot."

In the middle of snark and lightheartedness and overall hijinks the serious reminders of SecUnits slavery and subjugation ("SecUnits are not rabid murderers unless humans specifically order them to be") and any of the transgressions (even involuntary) punishable by torture and death are sobering. And anger-provoking. And poignant.

"I love it when humans forget that SecUnits are not just guarding and killing things voluntarily, because we think it's fun."

And no person needs to take that kind of treatment from anyone.

(view spoiler)

The ending of *Network Effect* left me so happy and hopeful. Because I love seeing our MB grow and develop and find what it wants and go for it. The universe owes it that at the very least.

"(Confession time: that moment, when the humans or augmented humans realize you're really here to help them. I don't hate that moment.)"

5 stars.

Now excuse me as I start my re-read already.

And now the impatient wait begins for the further adventures of Peri's SecUnit and Asshole Research Transport.

EDITED TO ADD: I caved in and switched the pronoun to Murderbot's preferred "it" instead of "he", based on the word of Gød Martha Wells . Feels jarring but I'll try.

My review of the first novella, “All Systems Red” is here.
My review of the second novella, “Artificial Condition” is here.
My review of the third one, “Rogue Protocol”, is here.
My review of the fourth one, “Exit Strategy”, is here.

Ratthi sighed, leaned against the wall and said, “So, you have a relationship with this transport.”

I was horrified. Humans are disgusting. “No!”

Ratthi made a little exasperated noise. “I didn’t mean a sexual relationship.”

Amena’s brow furrowed in confusion and curiosity. “Is that possible?”

“No!” I told her.

Ratthi persisted, “You have a friendship.”

I settled back in the corner and hugged my jacket. “No. Not—No.”

“Not anymore?” Ratthi asked pointedly.

“No,” I said very firmly.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

4.5 stars. Review first posted on Fantasy Literature:

Martha Wells’ Murderbot has been gathering enthusiastic fans (which would be certain to have Murderbot hiding behind its opaque armored faceplate), along with multiple Nebula, Hugo and other awards and nominations, as each of the first four novellas in the MURDERBOT DIARIES series has been published over the last three years. In *Network Effect*, the first full-length novel in this series, Wells is able to explore a more complex plot and to more fully develop Murderbot’s character and its relationships with others.

Murderbot is now with Dr. Mensah and the other Preservation Station characters who Murderbot was protecting in the first book, *All Systems Red*, and the fourth, *Exit Strategy*. Preservation is an unusually liberal society in this universe, where single-minded, coldhearted corporate profit-making is the norm, and Mensah and her family and friends treat Murderbot, who they call “SecUnit,” as a person rather than as a possession. Mensah’s brother-in-law Thiago, however, is suspicious of Murderbot’s influence over Mensah, and Mensah’s adolescent daughter Amana considers Murderbot an annoyance, especially after it scared off someone she thought was a romantic interest (“Yes, it was hilarious”).

As *Network Effect* begins, Murderbot is accompanying Thiago, Amana and several others on a survey expedition of another planet. After surviving an encounter with pirates — where Murderbot gets a chance to flex its muscles and show its expertise as a security consultant — the group lifts off the planet to rejoin their base ship in space. Just after the base ship exits a wormhole on its return to Preservation Station, there’s another attack on their group. This one succeeds in capturing Murderbot and Amana in their spacesuits and pulling them onboard the raider ship. Murderbot is completely bewildered to discover that the ship that attacked them is its old friend ART (an acronym for “Asshole Research Transport”) from *Artificial Condition*. But ART, the powerful artificial intelligence that controls the ship *Perihelion*, is nowhere to be found once they’re onboard the ship. Instead there are gray-skinned hostile humans that immediately try to kill Murderbot. Now it’s on!

The bot and AI characters — Murderbot, ART, and a couple of new ones — are absolutely fantastic. Murderbot's and ART's friendship (though Murderbot would be really reluctant to call it a friendship) gets a lot more complicated and real, especially after Murderbot thinks ART has betrayed it. One of the subplots features sentient killware, a lethal kind of spyware/malware, which was one of the best parts of this book, fascinating and unexpectedly poignant. Murderbot takes some substantial steps forward in its self-understanding and in deciding what it wants to do with its life. The right of self-determination for all sentient intelligences is an ongoing theme in *Network Effect*.

In addition to Murderbot's favorite human Dr. Mensah, a couple of other human characters start to stand out, including Mensah's daughter Amena, who has a way of cutting through Murderbot's protective shell. Wells has a degree in anthropology, which explains a lot about how well she writes the relationships and interactions between people and bots in this series. The title "Network Effect" has at least two different meanings: it's a key aspect of the enemy Murderbot and its friends and allies face in this novel, but it also references the growing and changing ties between Murderbot and its human and non-human friends. Murderbot still hates the F-word — that would be "feelings" — and it likes to snark about humans' stupid decisions, but it's now willing to admit that it cares about people and actually enjoys helping and protecting them.

A little of the tension went out of her body. "Thank you." Her face looked younger. She looked like she had been pretending to have hope and now she didn't have to pretend anymore.

(Confession time: that moment, when the humans or augmented humans realize you're really here to help them. I don't hate that moment.)

Network Effect isn't perfect: the pace lags in parts and the plot gets overly convoluted and confusing in the second half. One significant aspect of the key danger that the characters face doesn't make sense to me logically. (view spoiler)

But the good parts of *Network Effect* are just SO good that they completely outweigh any plot weaknesses. One more example: There's a bit with some "HelpMe.file" excerpts that Wells uses to good effect to relate some of the backstory. They're initially a bit of a headscratcher, if only because of their odd headers, but when the payoff comes much later in the book, it's a brilliant plot turn.

Murderbot — both the character and the series — has grown on me immensely with each book in the series. Murderbot may be a cyborg, but it's one of the most human and appealing characters I've had the pleasure of meeting.

Update 5/1/20: Rereading as of yesterday. I started looking at my ARC yesterday evening so I could write my full review, then I said to myself "I'll just reread the first 50 pages or so," and now I'm on page 200. DON'T JUDGE ME.

Comments after first read: 4.5 stars - it was great! The only thing better than a Murderbot novella is a full Murderbot novel ... with ART (the Asshole Research Transport) in it. Review to come! Cheers!! I'm sorry most of my Murderbot-loving GR friends have to wait until May 2020 to get this, but I promise it's worth the wait.

Initial post: A copy of the ARC of this book landed on my doorstep today!! I literally gasped in delight. What a fantastic surprise! Thank you Tor!!

THERE CAN NEVER BE ENOUGH MURDERBOT IN MY LIFE!

From Reader Review Network Effect for online ebook

From reader reviews:

Frances Feist:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book titled Network Effect? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have additional opinion?

Steven Whitney:

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Adam Carter:

In this era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability in doing something more are more important than other. Do you want to become one of it? It is just simple solution to have that. What you must do is just spending your time not much but quite enough to possess a look at some books. On the list of books in the top listing in your reading list will be Network Effect. This book which can be qualified as The Hungry Hillsides can get you closer in getting precious person. By looking upward and review this guide you can get many advantages.

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